

# Ponca Park

## Pick Your Passion

By Doug Carroll

Photos by Eric Fowler and Jeff Kurrus

*Ever since it opened in 1934, people have been coming to Ponca State Park to experience nature. Nestled in the bluffs on the banks of the scenic Missouri River, there has always been plenty to experience here: miles of trails through the dense hardwood forest; the wide, wild river; abundant wildlife; unique geologic history; rustic cabins and more.*



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Above: The Towers of Time sculpture, located near the entrance of Ponca State Park, represents three separate geologic periods and features an adjacent waterfall.

Left: Fifteen mini-lodges at Ponca State Park offer all the modern amenities, with views of the dense Missouri River woodlands from every window. For those wanting a little comfort and nature, there is no better place to spend a few days.

Opposite: Brothers Nick and Jacob Push of Omaha and Deb Ohlman and daughter Rachel of Pilger kayak through a restored Missouri River backwater, one of many activities available at the park.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS



KAYAKER AND AERIAL PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



But this is not your grandparents' Ponca State Park – with seemingly something new to offer each year, the park now mixes nature with ultra-modern amenities. Fifteen plush mini-lodges and two green cabins offer the conveniences of home. The park also has a vibrant naturalist program, which capitalizes on other additions to the park, including three miles of riverfront, the 1,762 acres of Missouri River bottomland that have been added to the park since 2000, and a new shooting range that lets people test their skills. In addition, the park's annual Missouri River Outdoor Expo draws thousands. All of which continues the long-standing tradition told in the park's slogan: "Where People and Nature Meet."



Ponca State Park, located less than three hours from both Lincoln and Omaha, has more than 1,400 acres of forest and rolling hills butting up to an unchanneled section of the Missouri River in northeastern Nebraska.

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS



Above: The 17,000 sq. ft Missouri National Recreational River Resource and Education Center features hands-on educational opportunities and exhibits focusing on the park area and the Missouri River. A must-stop for visitors wanting to know more about this fascinating region.

Left: Andrew Milan blows out flaming marshmallows as his classmates from Madison watch during school day at the Missouri River Outdoor Expo.

Opposite: Horseback trail rides through the park's woodlands are a long-standing staple on the park's list of activities.



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HORSEBACK AND AERIAL PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER